

Religion in Region: An Illustration of Magadha Kingdom in Jaina Padmapurāṇa

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Abstract: This study examines the portrayal of the Magadha kingdom in the Jaina Padmapurāṇa, focusing on how religion is associated with the region. The paper analyses the textual descriptions of Magadha's geography, flora and fauna, economy, and capital city of Rājagīr. It explores how the Jaina text incorporates and contests elements of Brahmanical religion while asserting Jaina philosophical and religious ideas. The arrival of Mahāvīra in Rājagīr and his sermons are examined as key moments linking Jaina teachings and philosophy to the Magadha region. The paper argues that the Padmapurāṇa uses rich geographical descriptions and religious narratives to establish Magadha as an important centre for Jaina thought and practice. By analysing the text's depiction of landscape, urban spaces, kingship, and religious contestation, the study demonstrates how regional geography is utilized to situate and elevate Jaina religious traditions within the cultural landscape of ancient Magadha.

Keywords: Magadha, Jainism, Padmapurāṇa, Rājagīr, Mahāvīra

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Whenever any textual traditions are written, it resembles geographical setting near its core literary figure. It always has an alternative insight about the central theme of geography. Historical geography is not something historians generally study as an end in it¹. They use geography to help define political, economic, or social issues and the cultural or religious. Geography of the past (and often only the physical aspect) is viewed as an explaining variable, and rarely as a variable to be explained. Certainly, geography can influence human behaviour. Opportunities for human life are distributed spatially in various ways. Human history evolves as individuals, communities, and other social groups pick and choose among these opportunities. It concerns the development of new ways of life, and the continual reorganization of new and old in an ever changing geographical mosaic.² Magadha is the synonym and phonetic variation for the area which is presently covered by the modern districts of Patna and Gaya and historically accepted as the core of the Magadhan empire.³ The name Magadha first appears in the Atharva Veda, where fever is wished away to the Gandharis, Mujawants, Angas and Magadhas.

Different scholars explain the term “Magadha” in different ways. Some of them explain it as derived from the people so named, while others argue that the word first came into existence from the land so named in early days. And thus these various explanations make the origin of the name Magadha very obscure. One group of scholars derive the term Magadha from the Magas of Persia, who, according to the Bhavisya Purana, were introduced in India by Krishna’s son Samba. But this is a very late derivation, and should be safely discredited, the cult of sun-worship, according to the late Sir R.G Bhandarkar, having been penetrated to India about the same time of the Kusana prince Kaniska is the most rely one. Another composition about the origin of a Magadha as an off-spring of a Vaisya father and a Kshatriya mother is too fabulous to be believed in⁴. In this study, we see the geography of Magadha described in the literary traditions and we are also seeing how religion is associated with the region. The primary text used for this scholarly work is Jaina Padmapurāṇa written by Raviṣeṇācārya. In this text, Jaina narrative revolving around the central figure of Rāma is described. This text had been written in Sanskrit language. Raviṣeṇācārya, the author has a distinctive style, and in his text, he draws a picture that symbolises the intermingling, subordination, and philosophical contestation among Brahmanical and Jaina religion. Jain Purāṇa adopted the style and fabrics of existing puranic literature, one can see the entire Jain Puranic literature which has been woven with threads and fibres borrowed myths, legends and beliefs from the Brahmanical literature⁵.

Region plays a vital role in History, as we can see, there is ample example in many textual traditions that, the region is key role in advancement of any literary tradition vis-a-vis royal patronage is also an essential part for that. In same context, we have taken the geography of Magadha region, which encompass the history visualising the prominent religion of Indian subcontinent. Magadha Kingdom witnessed the seat of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism, trio major religion of the region. So, it is essential part of history, as how different religious tradition perceives the geography in their literary commentaries.

Padmapurāṇa describes Magadha as

atha jamati dvīpe kṣetre bharatanāmani. magadhābhikhyayā khyāto vipayo’sti samujjvalaḥ
nivāsaḥ pūrṇapūṇyānām vāsavāvāsasannibhaḥ .vyavahārairasamkīrṇaiḥ kṛtalokavyavasthitīḥ

In the Jambudvīpa region of Bharata, there is a famous country called Magadha, which is well known kingdom. This area described as where the noble people live, and it looks like ‘the city of Indra’. The texts describe the city of Indra confined with all essential things required for ideal kingship. The leader is open-minded and does a good job of running the country.

Flora and Fauna of Magadha Kingdom described in Padmapurāṇa.

Historical records from multiple sources offer valuable information about the Magadha flora and fauna life. In 3rd century BCE, Indica tells about Magadhan kingdom as his “soil which is eminently fertile and well watered by a multitude of rivers... The greater part of the soil, moreover, is under irrigation, and consequently bears two crops in the course of the year”⁶. Buddhist scriptures, Chinese trip accounts, and archaeological findings provide additional support for the depiction of a verdant terrain and abundance of a wide variety of flora and fauna. Magadha’s economic and cultural growth was significantly influenced by its natural environment, which encompassed cultivated fields of rice and barley, as well as wild bamboo trees and mango orchards. The region not only had a flourishing agricultural economy but also played a significant role in the religious and literary traditions linked with it.

Magadha Kingdom is described where with the use of plough-shares, the country’s fields are tilled, and lotuses grow there like the best things on earth. The ‘pauḍa’ and sugarcane fields looked

Map of Magadha



Source: Internet

like they had been watered with milk. The leaves were slowly moving in the wind, and they were spread out all over the land like forests⁷. The country also supports the mountaineer vegetation. The texts try to locate their exaggeration by citing the vegetation of hills as mountaineer. The fertility and vegetation in the plains are seen in abundance in the region. We have the textual reference of fields of cumin plants, paddy, kidney bean in the country that are watered by water wheels with pots that look like matted locks of hair on the ground. This is the country that makes the best wheat and grows a lot of other kinds of cereals without any problems and with side by side grasses is also present.⁸

The author of Padmapurāṇa also focuses on the development of pastoral economy in the region; the texts also sustain the clarification with archaeology that there is evidence cowherd's ride on the backs of huge he-buffaloes. We have also the same reference that followed by skylarks with their heads up, eager to eat the bugs on the buffaloes' necks, which are decorated with a number of bells tied to colourful ropes and hung around the animals' necks. The bells make a pleasant sound. These buffaloes have milk in their udders. From the ocean of milk, it looks like they're in a panic about the milk because they've already drunk so much of it. The cows enjoy grazing on the tender grass, which breaks when they breathe and spreads out everywhere. When these cows are in the woods, they make the trees look white. The black bucks jumping around the countryside.⁹ Swans moving in flocks resemble the most virtuous persons, attracting people with their lovely melodies and making the ground whiter in some places. The cooing of peacocks, coupled with the different sound existing in the kingdom.¹⁰

People gather sand from the Ganga River, which coincides with Magadha Kingdom where lily flowers bloom, the country has green fields with lots of plants, and in some places there are groves of coconut trees that look beautiful and are well taken care of by gardeners. The flowers look like the front part of the parrots' beaks. This makes it hard to tell what the monkeys' faces look like. In this area, there is a lot of pomegranate tree, orchards and gardens.¹¹ Everywhere in the kingdom, you can find groves of grapefruit trees that are also full of citron fruits, whose juice is extracted by gardeners. These groves serve as resting spots for travellers, where they can get fruit to eat and water to drink. It looks like they are places where travellers can get water to drink. There are date palm trees with fruit on them that the travellers pick and eat. There are a lot of banana trees and tall *arjuna* trees growing on their edges.¹² We have another reference of swan in textual tradition as 'swans' sweet calls sound like they're singing, and the best people sit in groups on the shores of these lakes, which are full of lotus flowers and make the forests look beautiful'. The sheep, camels and the cows with calves, which are protected by the benign guards, are found crowded in all the directions. There are a large number of mares, the backs of which have been painted with saffron in order to attract the horses of the chariot of the sun-god which breath from the foreparts of their mouths, as if trying to educate their colts in the womb to move with speed, and are spread in the entire country¹³

Numerous people earn their living by killing numerous animals in order to plough the fields, putting forth arduous labour. Despite this, they are greatly concerned by the rulers. In this sense, when a person performs a task for pleasure, he is doomed to severe tragedy. Even if one obtains the money by some means, it must be safeguarded against thieves, fire, water, and the monarch. While doing so, a person encounters numerous obstacles, which causes him to feel frustrated¹⁴.

Inhabitants of this country are as delightful as pearls and have a character as pure as the moon in winter. Those of the householders who have always provided food for the travellers and who resemble the best fruit-bearing trees; as a result of the presence of such large homeowners, people continue to visit the area. Numerous high-ranking individuals wrapped in clothing of various hues and made from fragrant materials such as *Kasturi* and others resemble the Himalayan peaks. Inhabitants of that nation are so tall. In that country, the ills of falsity in the eyes of the people are eradicated by the piousness of Jaina teachings, and vast sinful woods are eradicated by the tapas of sages.¹⁵

In the Svetambara tradition, there was reference of terrible famine in the region of Magadha. This seriously affected the study of the monks who could hardly get alms for their subsistence and it resulted into migration of Bhadrabahu into Nepal. According to a same tradition, the region of Uttarapatha had a famine while Arya Vajraswami was present, and he would obtain food through the use of magical rituals. Vyavahara Bhasya documents a historical account of a famine in Magadh, Kosala, where a wealthy individual named *sravata*, who had accumulated a large amount of grain, prevented five

hundred Jain monks from leaving the land during the famine. Subsequently, as the price of the grain increased, he sold his grain and sadhus. Unfortunately, due to a lack of food, they resorted to suicide and were subsequently consumed by vultures. According to the Digambara tradition the cause of the great schism was a famine in the reign of Chandragupta in Ujjaini. Bhadrabahu ‘predicted’ that there would be a terrible famine in the country which would last for twelve years.¹⁶

In nutshell, depiction in the Padmapurāṇa aligns with historical understanding of Magadha as a fertile region with a strong agricultural base is product of check. However, it’s important to note that while this literary description provides valuable insights, it may also include exaggerations or idealized portrayals. Corroboration with archaeological and other historical sources would be necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of Magadha’s historical flora and fauna.

Rājagīr - The Capital

Rājagīr in ancient times was an important city in ancient India and the site of several significant historical debates and event. Ancient Buddhist and Jaina texts describe debates between the Buddha and Jain synchronisation in the region. The Samaññaphala Sutta of the Digha Nikaya, for instance, recounts a conversation between the Buddha and King Ajatasatru about the merits of various contemporary philosophical schools in this region. Alike, Jain texts also, for instance Kalpa Sutra mention Mahāvīra, the last Tirthankara of Jainism, visiting Rājagīr and engaging in debates with local scholars and kings and same is seen in the Padmapurāṇa.

Rājgīr and its vicinity is sacred to the Buddhists, as Buddha spent time there. Amongst the places frequently visited by him was by sure about the location of only a few spots like the Isigili, Vebhara and Vepulla mountain. With the vebhara mountain, is associated the Tapoda, Sattapani cave and Pīala cave. The later has been described as Pi-Pu-Lo Hisuen Tsang. The Tapoda ho is the spring in which Buddha used to take his bath has also been referred to by Buddhaghosa picturesquely under the Vebhara mountain.¹⁷ Gijjhakuta is famous in Buddhist literature talks about the place where Buddha narrowly escaped death by a stone hurdle by Devadutta. It has been identified with the peak in the Udayagiri hills, it is very near to Rājgīr.¹⁸

Jinaprabhasuri, a Jain author from the fourteenth century, includes Rājgīr as a sacred destination for pilgrims in Bihar in his work called Vividhatirthakalpa. Rājgīr holds great religious significance for the Jains as a sacred pilgrimage site. According to Jinaprabhasuri, one of its names is Rashbhapuri, a name that is not found in Brahmanical or Buddhist literature. Mahāvīra spent a total of fourteen rainy seasons in Rājgīr. At this location, eleven of his twelve prominent disciples perished. Jinaprabhasuri states that this place is considered sacred since it is the birthplace of their twentieth Tirthankara, Muni Suvarata.¹⁹

The Rājagīr fort was ringed by an ocean-deep moat and looked like the one beyond human habitation. This city had a famous archer and monarch named Śrenika who administered all classes properly. The monarch was like *Sumeru* Mountain and always helped others. Long-term sports were inebriated elephants. He revered glory, which always comes first. He didn’t value perishable life. As *Aryaputra*, he regarded all directions his ornaments. He didn’t have interest in Women²⁰. This fact consigned the Jaina faith of celibacy as the piousness and righteous element for sacred men. He regarded the corded bow his helper but not the mercenary warriors. Even the wind did not steal anything in his dominion, let alone others. Even ferocious animals did not kill, let alone humans. The king treated foes like *vajra* and bowed before ascetics and meritorious people like the cane²¹.

Rājagīr that is full with the scent of flowers, and it appears that the entire universe’s beauty has been gathered there. The city of Rājagīr is comparable to Yama’s inner apartment in that it grabs

everyone's attention because, just as in Yama's dwelling are thousands of Mahiṣis (or buffaloes) or queens, thousands of saffron-adorned damsels adorn the city of Rājagīr. (Therefore, the city of Rajagir is teeming with Mahiṣis, or queens, whose behaviour in the royal palaces is extremely suitable.) Several portions of this city were adorned with little wings that shook in the breeze, resembling fly-whisks. The splendour of the city can be compared to that of the city of Indra, because the areas adjacent to the location of Indra are adorned with fly-whisks. In addition, the gods' fly-whisks are moved there.²² The city looked like it was trying to take over the city of Tripura because, just like the people of Tripura had to deal with Mahadeva's arrows, the rich people of that area had enough luxury and fun. The houses in the city were all lined up and painted white with lime. Their shine was like that of a Candrakanta jewel made with tiny chisels. The city was full of drunk women wearing the most expensive jewellery and making strange sounds. So, it seemed to be either the city of Kubera, Alkapuri, or a reflection of it. Sages thought it was a *tapovana*, which means an orchard for meditation. The prostitutes thought it was Kamadeva's city or temple, and the dancers thought it was where they danced.²³

Dilip K. Chakrabarti's²⁴ analysis shows that our archaeological knowledge of ancient Rājagīr during the Buddha's period is restricted. The place has many literary connotations, but 6th-5th century BCE physical evidence is sparse. The hilltop fortifications may be tribal, predating Buddhism. The inner valley fortification was likely an embankment, not a defensive construction, and the historic difference between "old" and "new" Rājagīr seems incorrect. In the early historic period, the valley became a religious centre and the main settlement moved outside. Northern Black Polished Ware dates early occupation, although more excavations are needed to understand the site's development. Many Buddhist locations are identified by later literature rather than archaeology. He proposes a two-phase development: an early tribal centre and a major early historic settlement. He stresses the need for systematic archaeological studies at Rājgīr and other early historic Indian sites to better understand their growth and regional context.²⁵ Rājgīr symbolises the splendid union of the various religious cults the flourished on its sacred soil for centuries which reminds us wonderful phenomena in terms of sacred religious geography.

Religion and its Contestation in Padmapurāṇa.

Religion with the time always changes its course; we see transmission as well as incorporation of ideas in one religion to another religion in history. The motive behind this is to pump up a narration that shows superiority of a particular religion. Literature plays a key role in doing so. We see through certain examples as how religious incorporation is taking place in Jaina Padmapurāṇa.

Despite their dark complexion, they shone like rubies. Even so, those with light skin continued to enjoy a 'Pārvati-like existence with Siva'²⁶. The colour became a part religious identification, the Jain texts showing and comparing the Brahmanical deities associated with dark complexion and low born. King Srenika of the Magadha area, a king character in Jaina Padmapurāṇa, represents the archetypal picture of Brahmanical deities as a vivacious figure and compassion²⁷.

Another example set by the text is, Lord Mahāvīra orders Indra and furthermore Indra commanded his obedient to workers to set up three forts in gold which were studded with several types of gems of huge size and of different colours. The forts of Magadha kingdom is described and set to be in "On all the four sides of the forts the Gopura entrances were there, the gates of which were quite high. They were decorated with huge step-wells, and were covered with lustre of gems. Moreover, gates were filled with materials for *Astamangalas* looking astonishingly graceful. In the samavasarana, twelve rooms were built with the walls of crystal stones and were arranged in the form of circumambulation.²⁸ Again the interior of fort is described, in the first row; the great ascetics were seated with the *Ganadharas*. In

the second row together with Indrānis the spouses of the gods of the Kalpas were lodged. In the third one, the group of *Aryakas* with *Gananiyas* were seated. In the fourth one the astrological gods with their spouses were lodged. In the fifth one the spouse of *Vyantara-devatās* were seated. In the sixth one the spouses are Bhuvanvasi gods were seated. In the seventh one the astrological gods were lodged. In the eighth one Vyantara gods were lodged. In the ninth one the Bhuvanvasi gods were accommodated. In the tenth one the gods of Kalpa were seated. In the eleventh one the humans were there and in the twelfth one, animals and birds were accommodated. Another circumstance is noted in the text about the subordination Indra, observing the actual divine, extremely spotless virtues of the lord and getting surprised, prayed to the lord in the following words.

O lord with your vast lustre of the supreme knowledge resembling the sun, you have rid the universe of the sleep from the night and overpowered by the great illusion.

O lord you are free from pleasure and pain, are all knowledgeable, a great ascetic and you have achieved the last shore of the inaccessible ocean. Therefore I offer my salutation to you. You are the best of the boatmen; the traders like the graceful *jivas* could achieve the salvation with you because the blemishes like the thieves cannot plunder them on the way.

O lord, you have shown the spotless path of salvation, to them and you have destroyed their deeds with the use of your meditation like the fire flames. Such of the people who are without friends and the lord and are helpless in the world, you are the only protector and lord for them and you are the one who can relieve them of misfortune.

O lord, how can we recite the glory of your virtues because they are so innumerable and beyond comparison and could be known only by the people possessing supreme knowledge.

Lord Vardhaman, who could conquer the enemies in the whole of the universe, was seated over the *singhasana* in *samavasarana* then the throne of Indra started shaking. Indra then thought about the reason for the shaking of his throne and because of his divine knowledge he came to know of the factual position. Indra then remembered his commander who at once arrived there and stood before him with folded hands. Indra then issued the command to him that all the gods should be informed about the arrival of Dhirendra Vardhaman over Vipulacala mountain.²⁹

Thus, we see ample examples of Indra uttering the prayer, and offered his salutation to the lord Mahāvīra and after doing so, he prostrated before him on the earth with his lotus like hands touching the earth. This space quoted in the text can be transcribed as the Jaina iconic figure were intermingling with Brahmanical one, and the seat of Jaina icons is on the top of the hierarchy.

Jaina Religion and Philosophy in Padmapurāṇa: Mahāvīra's sermon at Rājagīr

In the text, the leader of the kings, king Śrenika, emerged from the city with his army. Lord Vardhaman sat on the lion throne beneath an Asoka tree whose emerald-gem branches held tender shoots with bundles of flowers whose radiance diffused in all directions. It was aesthetically pleasing, just like the *Kalpavrksa*, and it had the power to make people forget their sorrows. It seemed like a mountain covered in precious stones due to the green of its leaves.³⁰ The lion throne of the Jina radiated a mellow, pleasant light, giving the image of a rainbow draped in exquisite robes. The jewel in Indra's crown would lose its lustre as a result. Flowers showered by the gods were scattered on the ground, covering the three *chatras* that stood in for the three *lokas*. The flywhisks were being shifted around by the Yaksa king. The music of dundubhis was coming from the same direction. Jinendra Mahāvīra, who was adored by the people possessing enormous riches, besides the gods and the demons, reached the city of Rajagir. He was the same Jinendra Mahāvīra, who stayed in the womb of his mother having been purified by the maidens of the directions, possessing all the intelligence, knowledge of scriptures

and the time and who had enjoyed, He was the one who in spite of his being a child, acted like a matured person and Indra used to offer salutation to him.

The lord who himself disowned all the riches like the lustre of the lightning, taking them to be short lived and at the time of his receiving the dikṣa all the gods of the universe assembled there. He was the one who meditated upon samyagjñāna (correct knowledge), samyagdarsana (correct vision) and samyagcarita (correct conduct) and had destroyed the four destructive type of deeds. He was the one who achieved the kevala-jñāna (knowledge), which illumined the universe, and turned it into a *dharma-tirtha* for the welfare of the people (and by doing so) he himself felt beholden.³¹ While he was wandering on earth; the drought, famine, or the activities will not occur. The land up to Jina walked was purified of dirt, rocks, thorns, and the like, and filled with a sweet aroma. Stanatakumara and Meghakupara gods, whose bodies were decorated with lightning garlands, wore the *Jina* as an emblem of their devotion and watered the country with the fervent energy and fragrant water that bear their names. The dharma-cakra, whose a thousand spokes never stopped flashing and which had eclipsed the sun, always ploughed ahead of Jina³². Lord Vardhaman, endowed with the aforementioned characteristics, delivered his sermon on Jaina religion and philosophy on the vast Vipulacala mountain, which is close to Rājagīr.

To conclude it can be said that region has say in spacing out religion, In this paper we have seen through rich flora and fauna of Magadha kingdom. In describing geography, we emphasise on kingdom of Rājagīr, their courtyard, and the kingship. In the text, it also visualises, the beautification, grandeur of the city and deeply talks about the human habitation. Moreover, this paper also visualise a conflict between different religious ideas i.e Brahmanical deities and Jaina religious icons. Aside from that, this paper also examines the regional association with Mahāvīra, as well as his arrival in Rājgīr. The variations existed in synchronisation of Jaina religion and their regional incorporation of prominent (Magadha) geography in Padmapurāṇa is seen with analysis. King Śreṇika was the king of Magadha, he basically resides in his capital Rājgīr. Mahāvīra comes to the capital and Śreṇika becomes his disciple. All of spiritual knowledge, preaching and philosophy cited by Mahāvīra inspired the king to write the noble and pious Rāmāyaṇa story, and will see the Rāmāyaṇa story encompasses in text has high influence of Jaina religion and philosophy. So, the text touches the religious perspective and it is somehow come within a larger geographical bound, i.e the region of Magadha, so the paper is titled in this genre.

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26. The literature tries to simplify that a Brahmanical deity of dark complexion as inferior.
27. The king Śrenika was like the moon in accepting the art (or rays), was like the earth for ruling the lokas, he had the lustre of the sun and had the riches resembling Kubera. He protected his kingdom with his prowess and he was always just and equitable. He was closely related with Laksmi and he had never arrogant. The king is depicted as the actions of Visnu were aimed at the killing of Vrsasura, and his activities caused pain to the family of Daksa, but his riches never caused pain to the noble people. As the activities of Indra aimed at the destruction of the mountains, but his activities never resulted in the destruction of the races. As Yama, the lord of the southern direction always holds a staff in his hand, but his sense of judgement, did not award excessive punishment. As the water of Varuna is free from the wicked crocodiles, and other aquatic animals, similarly his riches were not protected by guards and could be used by the needy persons. To achieve the treasure of Kubera is of no consequence but it was not difficult to achieve his treasure of nobility. The composition of his poetry was beyond the competence of Sarasvati who was not aware of such a large number of words, these were the words dedicated to King Śrenika.
28. *Padmapurāṇa, Parva -2 verse 135-138*
29. *Padmapurāṇa, Parva -2 verse 110-112*
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32. *Padmapurāṇa, Parva -2 verse 101*